

An exploration into the desire for creative and innovative methods of investigative educative research through the medium of the ‘curated meal’.

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Abstract

This study explores the desire for creativity and innovation in the domain of gastronomy through the employment of multiple disciplines in the ‘curated meal’. Changes in ideologies and socio-economic issues have increased desire for ownership and agency of global and local issues concerning the environment, sustainability, cultural, and the socio-political. The ‘curated meal’ as an investigative and explorative research tool for instigating agency and intervention through didactic social discourse gave rise to the rationale for this study.

The meal as an explorative problem-solving tool has now established itself under the guise of the ‘curated meal’ at the hands of the scientist, the artist and the chef combining various disciplines to investigate and explore issues and concepts through the medium of food. The ‘curated meal’ disseminates information by raising awareness of specifically chosen issues and concepts through innovation, creativity, collaboration, and discourse. The ‘curated meal’ is a creative activity used as a tool of agency and intervention accessible through multi-disciplines.

The role of creativity in the production and development of the ‘curated meal’ is investigated in depth in this study. Isaksen and Murdock (1993, p.13) state that ‘creativity is an important area of study to meet the challenges of change, competition, and complexity, facing the modern world’. Creativity is an invaluable tool for investigative and educative inquiry, enabling its user to examine imaginative and prolific implementations of knowledge. The study identified the need for creativity and innovation to solve problems and build knowledge through instruction and discourse.

A lack of documented research on the subject of the ‘curated meal’ resulted in a comprehensive and investigative exploration of the activity over a three-month period in The Science Gallery, 2012. Quantitative and qualitative methodology was applied

in the research. Questionnaires, observational studies and semi-structured interviews with key informants were used to construct an in-depth investigation of the 'curated meal' and its concepts.

The research found that the 'curated meal' is a form of progressive cuisine, providing an egalitarian platform for discussion of issues raised whilst deconstructing food conventions through intervention. This study found that the 'curated meal' shifts the participant from the comfortable position of what 'is' to the challenging position of 'what might be' through explorative and investigative problem solving of modern day global and local issues.

The 'curated meal' is an evolutionary research tool that has emerged from contemporary cuisine and dining trends of slow food, grow it yourself 'GIY', underground anti-restaurants, pop-up restaurants, and supper clubs that underpin consumer concerns, providing alternatives to established cuisine institutions. The findings in this study concluded that while the 'curated meal' has emerged from developments in the realms of novel leisure dining, for it to flourish as a significant tool for investigative and explorative research across multiple domains, it needs to progress in the educational domain.

Introduction

In recent years there have been significant changes in the communication channels of social interaction, media coverage, and information dissemination, challenging peoples assumptions and views about the world. As this increasingly communicative society grows, it is becoming more and more apparent that the private actions of individuals have a collective social basis in society, (Germov & Williams, 2009). Influences in social behaviour and belief systems are being challenged through the diversification of cultures and ideologies, creating new trajectories of exchange.

Commonly shared experiences concerning sustainability, environmentalism, ownership, and socio-political issues are topical routes of discourse in contemporary

society. Emergent social patterns from individuals shared experiences provide the basis for concepts and issues discussed in the social sphere. Renewed interest in the everyday activity of eating as a social and didactic medium has been at the forefront of current trends of entertainment. People have been using the meal format to explore many of these experiences, which has led to the emergence of the 'curated meal'.

The 'Curated Meal' is an activity that has been curated, organised, and designed by a collective to disseminate research and cultivate creative responses to new situations with a focus on intervention, creativity, and collaboration; combining various disciplines to investigate and explore issues and concepts through the medium of food. The meal as an explorative problem-solving tool has now established itself under the guise of the 'curated meal' at the hands of the scientist, the artist and the chef.

The process of the 'curated meal' is as diverse as its team and is malleable in its operation. The collective social identity of the general public, academics, and cultural activists use the 'curated meal' as a tool to investigate, explore and express concerns in current areas of interest. Aspects of ownership and responsibility are visible in the exploratory and investigative activity of the 'curated meal'. The collaborative configuration of the team finds solutions to issues raised in the 'curated meal' employing cognitive creativity, innovation, and change.

Creativity is at the core of the 'curated meal'. Isaksen and Murdock (1993, p.13) state that 'creativity is an important area of study to meet the challenges of change, competition, and complexity, facing the modern world'. As an invaluable tool for investigative and explorative inquiry, creativity enables its user to examine imaginative and prolific implementations of knowledge. The impact of creativity across all disciplines underpins its invaluable use as a tool for innovative problem solving. This paper examines creative and innovative methodologies used in the production of the 'curated meal' as a way of investigative educative research to build knowledge; and its potential as an educational research tool.

The key issues underpinning the emergence of the ‘curated meal’.

The ‘curated meal’ is a considered combination of produce, communication, discourse, and skill that has been curated as an investigative, explorative research tool; employing agency and intervention in its mission to engage the participant into cognitive discourse via the ‘curated meal’s’ concept and agenda. It is a recent development in cross-disciplinary investigative research; employing the mediums of cuisine and gastronomy to disseminate information and highlight concerns, whilst challenging existent paradigms of the social, political, cultural, environmental, ecological and economical.

“Gastronomy is not currently a clearly defined subject with a beginning, middle and end. Indeed there is a great deal of overlap with many other professions, subjects, callings and trades”.

(Gillespie 2006, p.2)

The various teams collaborating in the production of the ‘curated meal’ present the agency of cuisine to the collective eaters in an effort to redesign their eating through critical thinking, (Denfeld & Kramer 2012, p.18; Hayes 2012, p.10; Jeremijenko, 2012). It is through the collaborative act that the team is equipped to creatively investigate and explore the issues raised in the ‘curated meal’, challenging existent models of social discourse through a postmodernist context. The cross-collaboration of the teams skills and knowledge encourages cognitive creativity to develop solutions to modern day problems and concerns through the issues explored and concepts investigated, (Douzet and O’Boyle 2012, p.8).

The current climate

The ‘curated meal’ explores the connection between the role of the eaters and their environments; linking the kitchen and the biosphere through raising awareness of the eater’s role in the production of food, (Denfeld & Kramer 2012, p.23). The raised awareness of issues presented to the eaters works in a similar manner as a grassroots campaign, ‘eaters are agents of selection’ (Denfeld & Kramer 2012, p.25), activating the eaters participation in the meal. This agency has spilled out to the everyday activities of people’s lifestyles, influencing people to take more responsibility and

ownership in their actions, encouraging cognitive awareness about the consequences resulting from their everyday decision making processes, (Blake, Mellor, Crane, 2010). The emergence of the 'curated meal' is a response to society's increased desire for interactivity and engagement in cognitive discussion of local and global contemporary social concerns through the familiar medium of the meal.

Contemporary Social Concerns

The 'curated meal' is a research tool used for inquiry, posing questions about consumer concerns, seeking innovative solutions and creative answers to these problems through assisting people in the redesign of their consumer choices, (Millstone, 2011). The emergence of the 'curated meal' as an educative tool challenges existing models of change and innovation through its investigation and exploration of society's holistic and interconnected relationship with global and local issues through the medium of cuisine.

The 'curated meal' exposes social problems and limitations in a bid to develop alternative and creative solutions to the highlighted issues underpinned in it. The meal fulfils the eaters' curiosity for knowledge through collaboration in the investigative/ educative meal, increasing the overall transparency of the meals production, (Denfeld & Kramer 2012, p.14). Such information can alter people's food choices, enlightening their sensibilities to make more health conscious/informed consumer decisions. People's desire for engaged learning through multi sensory experiences and exposure has contributed to the emergence of the 'curated meal', generating in-depth understanding of the concepts presented.

The Need for Agency

The 'curated meal' is a space where scientists, artists and chefs, come together in a brainstorming process to provide new and useful adaptations to the emerging challenges in the global environment, (Isaksen and Murdock 1993). The concepts discussed via the medium of the 'curated meal', 'produce the scope for difference, diversity and social change' providing the participant agency and a license for intervention, (Germov & Williams 2009, p.10). The 'curated meal' fulfils the eaters' curiosity for knowledge through collaboration in the investigative/ educative meal, increasing the overall transparency of the meals production, (Denfeld & Kramer 2012, p.14).

A trans-disciplinary approach to curating a meal is a reflection of contemporary society, mirroring extensive innovation, and creative explorations of new disciplines during the economic downturn. Mennell (2009, p.246) stated that ‘the study of culinary cultures and history’s highlights how changes in the way people cook, eat and enjoy it demonstrate economical, political and social changes in society, with food being found to mirror these transitions that societies have passed through’.

Postmodernist Cuisine and Gastronomy

Postmodernist cuisine introduces the diner to cognitive eating through exploring contemporary socio-cultural issues through the medium of food, (Tinderbox, 2008). It employs the objective culinary techniques of the chef to present subjective ideologies of socio-cultural issues via the deliberate mixing of artistic media and styles, and informed use of earlier styles and conventions.

‘The very causes of the previous academic neglect of gastronomy have led to a revolution of Brillat-Savarin’s ideas within a postmodern framework. In fact it is with his work in the background that trans-disciplinary gastronomy studies sharing the orientation of cultural studies is now emerging’,

(Scarpato 2002, p.134).

The ‘curated meal’ employs a postmodern approach in its activity requiring thought and analysis through the exploration of new and disconcerting situations that occur, which are not yet fully understood, (Best and Kellner, 1997). Kvale (2007, p.148) states that ‘postmodern philosophy is characterised by a disbelief in modern universal systems of knowledge, placing an emphasis on the conversational, the narrative, the linguist, the contextual and the interrelation nature of knowledge’. This rejection of modern universal systems has lead to the emergence of the ‘curated meal’, which employs creativity to challenge existent paradigms of social discourse and hierarchy in the 21st century, through change and innovation, (Kilgore 2001).

The creative development process involved in the production of the ‘curated meal’.

Creativity is evident throughout the ‘curated meal’ from its conception to the negotiations between the scientist, artist, and chef. The exploration of the concept and issues to be disseminated in the ‘curated meal’ through the ‘conceptual combination’ of the different domains, merge ‘the previously separate ideas, concepts, or other forms’ as a method to stimulate critical thinking, (Ward & Kolomyts, 2010), (Sternberg & Davidson, 1983). Critical thinking is developed from the combined thinking of the scientist, artist and chef in the ‘curated meal’, moving away from the segregated traditional ideologies of the separate domains.

The innovative presentation of the new conceptual dish encourages a fresh view of the issues under investigation to be explored rather than just focusing on the visual aesthetic, instigating the emergence of critical thinking. Many ingredients used in the presentation of the ‘curated meals’ concepts, were deemed unappetising by the eater for reasons such as: aesthetic, taste, texture, or smell. During the creative development process, the scientist, artist and chef, explore all the nuances of the meals ingredients to determine the most effective way to harness them for the portrayal of the ‘curated meals’ objectives of the political, social, environmental, local and global.

Location

The Science Gallery as an institution for creative exploration underpinned the investigative and exploratory inquiry of the ‘curated meal’. The location of any meal helps to identify its aim in the everyday dining or the celebratory whereas the ‘curated meal’ in an educational context (as demonstrated in the Science Gallery) lends resonance to the meals objective as an explorative and investigative tool for research. As the ‘curated meal’ is still raw and not yet established, the collaboration of science and art as an investigative research tool promoted through the sciences can be beneficial to both parties as they are both going through crises in modern times, particularly financial, (Denfeld and Kramer 2012, p.18). The atmosphere in the Science Gallery during the ‘curated meal’ played a pivotal role in the social interaction of the eaters, with the ambiance of the settings influencing the mood of the participants involved, thus enhancing the cognitive engagement.

Communication

Communication and exchange between the team and the eaters is integral to the creative development of the issues raised in the 'curated meal'. The arrangement of the 'eaters' is carefully considered to generate interaction and discourse at the meal. The curators of the exhibition commissioned the construction of a c-shaped table and positioned it in front the kitchen on the first floor in the gallery to encourage communal discourse during 'curated meals' between the diners and the team.

Communality in the meal was instigated by the team involved in the development process of the 'curated meal' by the introduction of the themes and issues raised, engaging cognitive discourse amongst the eaters. The commensal circle of eaters attending the 'curated meals' and sharing the intimacy of eating was a critical element of the sociability of the 'curated meals', reflecting in the eater's identities their social affiliations in the context of the 'curated meal', (Meiselman, 2000). This aspect of social communal dining explored the egalitarian nature of the 'curated meal' through its discussion of global and local issues of the socio-political, cultural, economical, and the environmental that the participants had equally vested interest in.

Problem solving through the medium of the 'curated meal'

The 'curated meal' combines the diverse domains of science, art and cuisine to critically and creatively tease out and explore the concepts in all their nuances. It employs collective cognitive creativity through conscious problem solving strategies to develop and generate novel menus fitting the curators' specifications. Through the collaborative process, the scientist and the artist fully explained the concept of the meal and the issues underpinning the activity to the chef so that the objectives would be fully investigated; utilising the teams objective and subjective creative abilities of problem solving, (Douzet & O'Boyle 2012, p.8; Julius 2012, p.6). The combined creativity of the scientist, artist, and chef widens perspectives in these fields and has the possibility to create new knowledge and cuisine through cognitive collaboration and problem solving.

The nature and role of the ‘curated meal’.

The nature of the ‘curated meal’ is to advance the scientist’s, artist’s or chef’s, theories into a diverse field of discussion in a similar manner to how an artist would hold an open critique of their work or how a scientist would present their work to their peers.

In postmodern society, gastronomy has become a significant source of identity formation, (Richards, 2002). The ‘curated meal’ questions why, how and what eaters eat. Specific ingredients incorporated into the meal recipes were central to the issues of the meal. Considerate sourcing and preparation of the ingredients was integral to the concept of the meal. Food is steeped in meaning and its semiotics change for different foods in different contexts and cultures. The ‘curated meal’ is an act of intervention that deconstructs food conventions and transforms participants’ perceptions of cuisine.

Concepts and aims of the ‘curated meal’.

The aim of the ‘curated meal’ is to raise questions and stimulate critical thinking and ‘challenge existing paradigms’ around the menus themes, (Mezirow 1981, Brookfield 1995). The ‘curated meal’ is used as a tool for inquiry, stimulating intervention and agency in an egalitarian context attempting to redesign people’s cognitive actions, (Jeremijenko, 2012). Every aspect of the meal is a carefully considered manoeuvre to successfully engage the diner in the concept of the meal. The combinations of flavours, presentation or the cooking methods used in the ‘curated meal’ are not necessarily produced to please the diner. Similarly to an art exhibition, the curated menu is constructed by the team to convey the meal’s concept. The team acts as an agent of change in the exposure of the issues and uses the eaters to explore and investigate the information further.

The role of the stakeholders

The scientist, artist, and chef engage in cross-discipline adaptation to cultivate creative responses to new situations, developing greater practical and mental aptitudes

through progressive cuisine. The 'curated meal' transforms the role of the participant from a passive eater into an active eater, questioning the composition and meaning of the meal whilst fabricating solutions to questions posed during the eating of the meal, (Denfeld and Kramer, 2012, p.15).

The 'curated meal' is seen as an investigative and educational platform attracting a range of eaters from the novice to the highbrow gastronome. The eaters', who attend the 'curated meal', actively contribute to the construction of the meal through their participation, (Best & Kellner, 1997). The scientist, artist and chef change the functionality of cuisine to a more subjective medium than objective functional sustenance through harnessing cuisines explorative and investigative qualities to stimulate active discourse around issues raised over the course of the 'curated meal'; 'transforming it from an infantilised idea where everyone is sitting back and being fed like a baby, that is in some ways the pinnacle of luxury, pleasure and enjoyment', (Julius 2012, pp.15-16).

Curating a meal

The 'curated' feature of the meal lends an artistic aesthetic to the 'curated meal' as the word is commonly associated with the art gallery. The act of 'curating' is to: select, organise and look after items in a collection or exhibition, (Sevenson & Waite, 2011). Every feature of the 'curated meal' is curated, from the process of selecting the team and produce to the issues explored within the format of a meal. Richards (2002, p.13), states that 'people identify with certain types of cuisine' thus the meal becomes a product of the teams' collective identity to be consumed by the diner.

As the location of the meal is influential to the atmosphere of the 'curated meal', (Buerger & Noack, 2009), the scientist's, artist's, or chef's, meals capture the viewer through haptic participation with the work. The 'viewer' becomes 'eater' and is invited to engage with the work on a multi-sensory level. The museums conventional rule of 'look, don't touch' is cast aside by consuming of the object of investigation; the artwork/ meal. As a result of this, the meal establishes a communal atmosphere, through the construction of a social equilibrium, levelling culturally perceived barriers between the art and the viewer.

The role of creativity across disciplines and in practice in the ‘curated meal’.

The practicalities of cross-disciplinary collaborations in times of economic instability are linked to the emergence of the ‘curated meal’, (Scarpato, 2002). The teaming together of multiple disciplines effectively strengthens and condenses the message to reach a diverse audience. Diversity breeds creativity, furthering individual’s work practices via shared explorative and investigative experiences. Through creative compromise and collaboration, each discipline can learn new skills from collaborating in the ‘curated meal’, (Danaher 2012, p.6).

Creative Technology

Knowledge can lead to indelible crystallisation, stagnating the scientist’s, artist’s, or chef’s ability to see things in novel ways. Used as a research tool, the ‘curated meal’ explores new technologies, accessing multiple domains, and increasing creativity and lateral thinking through the collaborative process. Interface between the scientist, artist, and the chef loosens up and enhances creative flow through the formulation of a synergistic relationships. The scientist, artist, and chef, collectively exploited various technologies to creatively develop methods of production in the construction of the ‘curated meal’. The cumulation of the different disciplines helped the team to decipher new techniques of communicating information in a novel way through the creation of innovative dishes that embodied the concepts of the ‘curated meal’, (Chakrabarty and Woodman 2009).

The collaborative practice of the scientist, artist, and the chef in the development of the ‘curated meal’, furthered their work practices through the incorporation of new and creative methods of production. Julius (2012, p.6) and Danaher (2012, p.6), both stated that their involvement in the production of ‘curated meals’ oriented their practices in new directions that would not have been explored otherwise. It was through the establishment of clear and stringent guidelines imposed by Jeremijenko that the team had to improvise and redesign elements of the meal to satisfy the curator’s original hypothesis, (Danaher, 2012).

Documenting the meal

The documentation of the ‘curated meal’ is integral to its longevity. The team documents the meal the same way a scientist, artist, or chef would document their studies. The documentation of the meal as an activity has evolved from the menu to include research diaries, emails, sketchbooks, photographs, and is recorded with video footage to document the conversation at the meal. This documentation is used as part of the process of the ‘curated meals’ production. The dissemination of documented cuisine is rapidly influencing the way people eat and engage with food. The educational role of the ‘curated meal’ furthers creative problem solving and enlightens the eater to the issues discussed at the table.

According to the curators of the exhibition, the nature and art of the ‘curated meal’ is evident through the eater’s participation, (Denfeld and Kramer 2012, p.20). Art is a communicative act, (Boden, 2009) in which the team communicates the concepts and issues to the eaters at the ‘curated meal’. The discussion is at the core of the ‘curated meal’ with the creativity of the team curating the meal transporting the eater into cognitive discussion whilst being immersed in the activity, (Douzet and O’Boyle 2012, p.15).

Communal dining is intrinsic to the ‘curated meal’ and enriches the experience of eating through communication during the meal, (Fields, 2002). The eater merges as valuable stakeholders in themselves, contributing to the documentation of the meal through their use of video, shared online photo diaries, reviews, and interaction with the creator via shared social media channels such as ‘Twitter’, ‘Instagram’, and ‘Facebook’. This instant sharing of the ‘curated meal’ helped further disseminate the motivations of the scientist, artist and the chef to a broader global audience.

The future of and development of the ‘curated meal’.

The versatile format of the ‘curated meal’ enables it to be reproduced extensively as a tool for education or social discourse. However its evolution as a tool for research and critical thinking is not yet assured and its possibility to change direction into the

leisure world where it's intervention and agency could be lost might undermine the entire concept of the 'curated meal'.

The entertainment characteristics are not paramount to the ethos of the 'curated meal', however it is this appealing feature that will help lead the 'curated meal' into its future establishment as an educative, explorative and investigative research tool. The 'curated meal' is an evolution in cognitive eater engagement through 'social configurations [that places the eater in] a framework, which they must inhabit, whilst entertainment places images in front of the viewer to be looked at', (Bourriaud 2008, p.56).

The 'curated meal' as a new tool for conducting research

Used as a research tool, the 'curated meal' explores new technologies, accesses multiple domains and increases creativity and lateral thinking through the collaborative process. The didactic role of the 'curated meal' furthers creative problem solving and enlightens the eater to the issues discussed at the table, (Jeremijenko, 2012). The construct of the meal provides a multi sensory experience combining all the senses simultaneously to explore modern issues, (Meiselman, 2000). The eaters' sensory investment in the 'curated meal' ensures that the experience is more memorable than a newspaper article or a talk given on the subject.

The desire for novelty and up-to-date information is attractive to the participants that are engaging in the 'curated meal'. It can be used as a platform to showcase novel innovations in technology, production, and cooking to the participants attending the meal, in a similar format to a trade show or exhibition. The chef is given freedom to create in the 'curated meal' and this results in success and failures, both of which are beneficial to the learning process, (Douzet and O'Boyle, 2012, p.6). Elements of novelty increase participant's attention and awareness, and are crucial to the future development of the 'curated meal', (Denfeld & Kramer 2012, p.4). The scientist's, artist's and chef's roles as creators and designers are an attractive pull for the innovative consumer. The creative novelty present in the 'curated meal' revives old/ common/ tired issues in a fresh light, uncovering all their nuances.

The potential of the ‘curated meal’ in raising awareness of food issues

The accessibility and versatility of the format of the ‘curated meal’, makes it an advantageous mechanism to highlight issues of agency, intervention, socio-political, cultural, environmental, and other global and local concerns. The cognitive discourse between the participants is at the core of the ‘curated meal’, and highlights food as a signifier of national, regional and global influence, (Germov, Williams 2009, p.20).

Food is one of society’s most basic needs, forming rich identities through its consumption, abstention, and meaning, (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). The ‘curated meal’ poses questions to the eater about issues of sustainability, safety, and agency in production and consumption of food; engaging the participant in the multi-sensory activity of eating to evoke critical thinking about the issues at hand. The investigative and explorative activity of the ‘curated meal’ is continuously manifesting innovative and creative technologies, dishes and concepts, raising contemporary issues to the forefront of social cuisine through igniting agency and cognitive creativity in the participants of the ‘curated meal’.

Educational benefits of collaborative practice

The collaborative practice of the ‘curated meal’ creates ‘new ingredients, new cooking techniques and new forms of presentation and delivery, combined to produce new dishes, new meal experiences and whole cuisines’, (Hjalager & Richards 2002, p.227). Creativity is bred through the cumulation of knowledge and skills, enhancing the abilities and cognitive development of the team, (Ward & Kolomyts, 2010). The team’s collaboration resulted in a continuous investigative and inventive learning process, requiring initiative and resourcefulness in the production of the ‘curated meals’ confined concepts through the mediums of science, art and cuisine.

“The central importance of food in social life means that its study is the province of diverse academic disciplines. In such the field of food, there is much that we can learn through interdisciplinary exchange.”

(Bourriaud 2008, p.56)

Conclusion

For the 'curated meal' to flourish as a significant tool for investigative and explorative research, it needs to progress in the educational domain. The 'curated meals' lasting impression moves the eater from the 'raw', passive consumer, through profound engagement with the objectives of the meal to 'cooked' cognitive consumption, (Levi-Strauss 1969, p.27; Tannahill, 1968). The eater is shifted from the 'taste of necessity' to the 'taste of liberty', where food's function is transformed from fuel into a stylised form, (Bourdieu, 1984). The transformation of the eater from a passive role to an active position, questions the composition and meaning of the meal, engaging the eater into critical thinking to help the team investigate and explore solutions to the issues posed during the eating of the meal.

The 'curated meal' is still raw and not yet established but it is happening. It will take a long time for it to be accepted as a rigorous valid tool for investigation in the broad issues of the political, social, environmental, cultural, and ecological. The association of the scientific domain with the 'curated meal' may lead to its future establishment as a recognised and significant tool for investigative and explorative research potentially used across multiple domains.

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